

History of the Old Baldy Civil War Round Table

By Mike Cavanaugh

With the after-glow of the wonderful luncheon in January, I began to think back to the beginning of the Old Baldy Civil War Round Table and some of the highlights over the past thirty-eight years. Who were the people who made the history of our round table? Looking back on those first days made me smile, laugh, and sometimes, shake my head in disbelief. But there is also sadness remembering those who are no longer with us. They were not only fellow members, they were close friends. With that, I hope to offer some tidbits on the history of our round table in future issues of our newsletter. Let me start at the top.

Bill Hayes: was the person who came up with the idea of forming a Civil War round table in Camp 200, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. He was the first president and he did the most to organize and direct us to become one of the best known and active round tables in the country. As best as I can recollect, beside Bill Hayes and myself, these were the people present at the first meeting at Camp 200: Harvey Wilson, Joe Rzotkiewicz, Warren McGuigan, Herman Poehler, and Clarence Riddle. Herman and Clarence were officers in Camp 200 but they never attended another meeting and then the Camp was dissolved. But that's a story for another day.



Left to Right: William Hayes, Tom Monahan, Clarence Riddell, Warren McGuigan, Mike Cavanaugh, Dave Charles, Dr. Nelson Aspen, Herman Poehler, Joe Rzotkiewicz, Russ Pritchard

Bill Hayes and I were members of the Philadelphia Police Department assigned to the 25th District along with Harvey Wilson, who was our lieutenant. The first order of business was a vote to name the round table. It was a choice between Old Baldy and General Winfield Scott Hancock. You know who won, but I must admit I voted for the general. No regrets! The first

official meeting was held at the Civil War Library and Museum on Pine Street. Dues were set at \$10 per individual, \$15 family, and \$5 student. It was agreed we would meet on the third Thursday of the month throughout the year. Initially the meetings consisted of members presenting programs on their favorite Civil War subject. That being we were a true Civil War round table. And as for this so called round table, it was not uncommon to see a case of beer and maybe a bottle of Rebel Yell whisky or Old Grand Dad bourbon. This, for me, was before I discovered Guinness. I was a late bloomer! This venue, as you can imagine, produced some heated discussions. It never got down to challenging someone to a duel and it was usually forgotten by the next meeting. We probably did not bring in an outside speaker in well over a year. Bill Hayes could always be counted on to liven up the room. He was a big fan of Major General Dan Sickles, commander of the Union Third Corps. Bill's ancestor, Major John P. Dunne of the 115th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, was assigned to Sickles' Third Corps. Bill would argue with anyone who criticized Sickles. He stood almost alone in his support of the general and his action at Gettysburg. Some said it was almost impossible to hold a conversation on any subject with Bill Hayes without the name of Dan Sickles coming up. One thing Bill was good at was running field trips. He was one of the most organized people I ever met. On camping trips with our boys everything had to be cleaned and put back into its original box. Bill was the cook and breakfast took forever getting everything just right.

Bill Hayes was promoted to detective in the mid-1990s and retired soon after. He and his wife Ruth relocated near Orlando, Florida. He worked for the "Mouse" for several years. I hear from him and Ruth by email now and then, but I don't believe he is in good health.

Joe Rzotkiewicz: One of my proudest moments in Old Baldy was when I finally learned how to spell Joe's last name! Dave Charles made it simple, he called him "The Mad Pole!" Joe was a take charge guy who took on the task of putting the GAR Museum in some sort of order until we moved the Round Table to Pine Street. He was a serious student of the Pennsylvania Militia in the Gettysburg Campaign. Joe planned to write a book on the subject but, as far as I know, he never did. I believe he had a degree in political science but ended up working as a clerk in the Pennsylvania State Store system.

Joe loved Gettysburg and Bill Frassanito, the famous Civil War photography expert and author. He was known to knock on Bill's door on Baltimore Street any day or night ignoring the absence of a "welcome" mat. Bill Frassanito was not a warm and fuzzy guy. He went to bed usually after three in the morning and awoke well into the afternoon - ala Winston Churchill. When we dedicated the John Gibbon statue on the 125th Anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg, Bill was invited to say a few words. He asked what time the program would start. When we told him 9:30 a.m., he gracefully declined. I ran into Joe and his son at the Camp Geiger Civil War Days in Whitehall, Pennsylvania a few years back. Meeting my wife Susan for the first time, he gave her a big hug. He was still the same old Joe.



Harvey Wilson and Dr. Nelson Aspen

Harvey Wilson: was one of my most favorite people ever. He had hundreds of stories about the Civil War, the Police Department, World War II, and life in general. Harvey was a World War II veteran serving in the Army Air Corps as a photographer. He shot photos from a B-29 in the aftermath of the Atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Harvey had his own copies which he proudly would show to anyone interested. He loved to visit all the Civil War battlefields but his favorite, by far, was Antietam. When any talk turned to the major battlefields - especially Antietam - Harvey called that the “thick stuff.” However, when the conversation turned to some obscure Civil War event or personality Harvey would politely interrupt with “Can we get to the thick stuff?”

I remember we used to visit battlefields crowded into a medium size car. Harvey became friends with a local International Harvester dealer (are they still in business?) in our police district. They had a nine-passenger van perfect for battlefield trips. One day Harvey’s friend said why not take the van for a test drive over the weekend. We did – to Petersburg, Virginia! 802 miles! Thankfully Harvey’s friend was okay with it. He did say, however, in thirty-five years in the business it was the longest test drive he could remember.

Harvey was old school, a real gentleman. My wife referred to others in the round table as “Your Civil War friends!” But she loved Harvey. After I transferred to Highway Patrol, I lost touch with him. His health failed and I deeply regretted not seeing him in the end. He was not the same old Harvey Wilson, and, at that time, I could not handle it. He passed away in October 1991.

Warren McGuigan: a close friend of Bill Hayes was sort of a mystery man. Warren listed his occupation as a “security specialist.” He was always well armed. Better than Harvey, Bill and I put together. The crown jewels of his collection included a NRA Match M-1 Garand rifle and a NRA Match Army 45 semi-automatic pistol. The last we heard of Warren he was working somewhere in the Middle East. He was on a bus traveling between countries when it was stopped by a band of robbers (This was well before 9-11) and they took everything but the clothes on his back. Thank heavens he was not injured or killed. Fortunately, Bill Hayes had possession of Warren’s guns. I don’t believe anybody has heard from him since. It would be great to hear from him again and know he is OK. He is a great guy and a good Old Baldy member. By the way, his Civil War ancestors were from West Virginia which he loved to talk

about. But sorry Warren, this would not be acceptable in Harvey Wilson's definition of "thick stuff."

Tom Bowman: Who now lives in South Carolina, was very active in Camp 200 and the GAR Museum as far back as early 1977, the same year Old Baldy was founded. I spoke with him recently and he was pretty sure he attended all the meetings of Old Baldy that were held at Camp 200 until the move to Pine Street.

Tom Naville: I have been unable to contact Tom but I do remember several years ago we held an Old Baldy anniversary dinner and we attempted to invite all the past presidents and founding members. Tom was positive that he was a founding member. Hopefully future information will surface that will confirm Tom Bowman and Tom Naville as founding members.

In this issue, I cover three early members who were major players in the history of our round table; Dave Charles, Blake Magner and Lee Quinn. All gone but surely not forgotten!

David Wise Charles: A World War II veteran of the 8th Armored Division. After the war he was an over-the-road salesman on the east coast. Being an avid Civil War buff – his grandfather fought with the 2nd New York Heavy Artillery – over the years he visited many of the east coast battlefields numerous times. Dave was a collector of those little pictures called CDVs (calling cards). His collection was probably one of the finest in the country.

In the mid-1970s, the camp received a letter from college student Brian Pohanka (who became a highly regarded historian and preservationist). He reported that the tomb of Major General



David Charles

Winfield Hancock in Norristown was being vandalized and was in danger of being completely destroyed. He hoped Camp 200 and the Old Baldy CWRT would take on the task of stopping the destruction and restore and protect the tomb. Brian would do all he could to help us, he added. A group got together to check out the situation. It was worse than we imagined. The entrance gate was ripped off and two of the burial compartments were in the process of being broken. The floor was littered with dirt and trash and the area around the tomb was literally a dump complete with an abandoned above-ground swimming pool. It was apparent to all something had to be done right away! The burial compartment had to be protected first along with the tomb itself.

To do this the tomb entrance was sealed with cinder block. Next plans were made to form a committee to not only save the general's final resting place but make it fit for a great soldier and a man who almost became president of the United States. Noted historian and tour guide Ed Bearrs called General Winfield Scott Hancock the finest corps commander in either army in the Civil War.

A national drive to raise money to restore the tomb was crated. Donations were received from all over the country. One letter of support we received was from Mr. David Charles. With a generous donation, he asked if there was anything else, he could do. Not to miss a chance to pull in a volunteer, I invited Dave to the next meeting of Camp 200 and the Old Baldy CWRT. He accepted the invitation and I happily introduced him to the membership as the new chairman of the Hancock Tomb Committee! Dave never let me forget this, but he still wanted to help. I informed him I was just “delegating authority.” The campaign began with mass mailings, ads in the Civil War Book Exchange and other Civil War periodicals. Many historic organizations were contacted along with Civil War reenactment units. Information tables were set up at Civil War shows and reenactment events. These were very successful and a lot of fun.

At one show Dave and I were manning a table in Winchester. A gentleman in full Confederate uniform walked in with his son – about 8 years of age - also in full Confederate uniform. They were a sight to behold. The man moved on but the youngster slowly walked over to check out our table. Dave said, “Son would you like some material on General Hancock?” Backing off, he replied **“My Pappy taught me not to truck with no Yankees!”** Mark that one down as a maybe. The shows were a great experience and most attending spoke quite favorably of the general. Hancock had a very good reputation in the South after the war. Half of the donations received were from the south.

One of the most moving stories came when we received a letter with a five-dollar bill enclosed from a Mr. Winfield Scott Port. The very shaky hand-written letter said he was named for the general and offered his support. His father was a Civil War veteran who was a member of the famed Pennsylvania Buck Tails. Calling his home number, we spoke to his daughter. She told us her father was in his late eighties and almost blind. We asked if it would be possible to visit him someday. She replied that would be wonderful, her father would love to meet us. On arrival he was anxious to tell us stories that his father told him about his service with the Buck Tails. Mr. Port told us how happy he was that we were attempting to save the general’s tomb. He wished he was able to donate more. Before leaving we presented him with a kepi with a buck tail attached. Running his hand over the buck tail he talked about when his father took him to the Gettysburg reunion. Dave Charles told him his father also took him to the 1938 reunion. “No, we went to the 1913 reunion,” Mr. Port replied. “and I shook hands with General Sickles!” We were in awe. To this day, those present could always proudly proclaim, “I shook the hand of a man who shook the hand of General Dan Sickles!”

Blake Magner: Joined our round table in the early eighties. He was very active from the beginning giving pro- grams, participating in field trips, helping our round table whenever he could. Blake also served as president in the mid-1980s. He was very passionate about his views on the war and especially Gettysburg which was his first love.



Blake Magner

Blake was actually thrown off the Gettysburg “Chat Line” twice. His most important contribution to the history of the Old Baldy CWRT was his chairmanship of the General John Gibbon statue project on the Gettysburg battlefield.

In 1986, Old Baldy member John Reilly, the District Attorney of Delaware County, contacted the membership and informed us that there were funds available to erect a statue of General John



Gibbon Model

In the early 1900s, the State of Pennsylvania made available funds to erect statues of every Pennsylvania general that fought at Gettysburg. When it came to John Gibbon and Samuel Crawford the funds ran out. Through John Reilly and state officials the funds were restored and made available to erect the statues of the last two generals. Each project would receive \$75,000.

A committee was formed from the membership of Old Baldy and the Civil War Library and Museum and it was decided to erect a statue of General John Gibbon. Blake Magner was elected chairman and yours truly treasurer. Right off the bat strong supporters of the project would be the Union League of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Commandry of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS). Terry Jones was named the sculpture and project manager. His fee was \$75,000 just to produce the statue. This meant we had to raise at least \$6,000 for incidentals and find a base to complete the project. Major players and average Civil War buffs came forward and more than \$8,000 was raised. The balance of over \$2,000 was given to the Gettysburg NMP for maintenance. The base of the statue came from the MOL- LUS plot at Mt Marah Cemetery in West Philadelphia. It was the base for the Silent Sentry bronze statue that was stolen and recovered several years back. It now stands in a place of honor in the Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia. Using this base saved us over \$25,000! The project moved along nicely and it was ready for dedication on July 2, 1988, the 125th anniversary of the battle. After a very moving and well attended dedication ceremony, Blake Magner and the committee gathered behind the General and toasted the event with a bottle of Dom Perignon.



Final Monument

Over the years Blake had the ritual of setting next to the general in his folding chair smoking a cigar on the anniversary of the dedication. One year a van load of Japanese tourist passed, stopped, and backed up. The occupants jumped out and began snapping pictures. Blake Magner was in his glory!

Lee Quinn: was an active member of Camp 200 and Old Baldy right after the formation of the round table. He was an exceptional researcher who could dig up obscure information on any Civil War subject. It seemed like every time I saw Lee he would hand me some new material

related to my research on the Battle of the Crater. As an Old Baldy volunteer at the Civil War Library and Museum, Lee was extremely helpful in assisting visitors with their research. When Lee's mother passed away, he donated close to \$80,000 in stock to the Library. This kept the doors open for more than a year. As a member of the Library Board of Directors, Lee's input was valuable in moving the Civil War Library and Museum forward. He was a life-long member of the Civil Air Patrol and attended many of our events in full uniform. One way Lee stood out from the rest was his term as round table treasurer. Old Baldy has been blessed over the years with a long line of ruthless treasurers (not you Herb Kaufman!). You always knew when your dues were due. One time I received a Christmas card from Lee. "A Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year - by the way your dues are due!" But Lee Quinn was just a real nice guy who loved to talk about history in general the Civil War in particular - and he always had a picture of his latest cat.

The Old Baldy CWRT and the Civil War Library and Museum

Founded in 1888 by Union Army veterans, the Civil War Library and Museum in Philadelphia held a collection of Civil War artifacts, books, and papers second to none. It was at the beginning basically a private club supported by the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) and the Union League of Philadelphia. But it was incorporated, and the collection privately owned by no one, would go to the state of Pennsylvania in event the museum and library would be forced to close. In January 1977, we were invited by director **Russ Pritchard** to meet in the Lincoln Room. This is where the first official meeting of the Old Baldy Civil War Round Table of Philadelphia was held. From the very beginning Old Baldy became a valuable tenant contributing to the upkeep and continuation of the operation of the institution. It became – as I like to call it – the tail wagging the dog. Old Baldy members contributed funds, workers, volunteers and even paid staff. Almost from the very beginning Old Baldy members were represented on the CWL&M Board of Directors. For many years, thanks to **Steve Wright** serving as curator, **John Craft** as director and **Charlie Barrett** running the museum store, the building was humming with activity. It was Old Baldy members who kept the doors open. Volunteers not only provided staff during the week, they had enough men and women to open the building on Saturdays and Sundays. This was mainly through the efforts of long time Old Baldy member **Pat Purcell**. Another group of members took on the task of cataloging the eight thousand volume book collection. John Craft's wife **Debbie Craft**, used her expertise to create the wonderful "Meade Room." Many of our members had non-member friends who volunteered to do such things as carpentry work, painting, and general maintenance saving thousands of dollars. One member, who passed away, left us funds in his will sufficient to put a new roof on the building

Old Baldy held many fundraising events, book raffles, and membership drives which enabled us to contribute thousands of dollars to the library and museum treasury. In one year alone Old Baldy contributed over ten thousand dollars. We even paid for leasing of the copy machine. John Craft spent many hours working on obtaining grants that helped financially and also made other institutions aware of our existence.

That's the nuts and bolts story of the Old Baldy CWRT and the CWL & M. But what was it like to be a volunteer? The job was mainly helping people to appreciate the unbelievable Civil War collection, one of the finest in the country. The collection was featured many times in the Philadelphia Inquirer and local newspapers along with local TV stations. Another important job was helping visitors with research. People were amazed at the information that was available on the Civil War. If we did not have the information, we usually knew where to get it. It was special to see someone's eyes light up when we found information on their ancestor who had fought for the Union or the Confederacy. High school and college students found valuable primary source material working on their school assignments. Below you will find some interesting facts about the Old Baldy CWRT:

Members of note:

- **William Smith** was the first violinist with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy.
- **Nancy Caldwell** - the first female president of Old Baldy.
- **Pat Caldwell** and **Don Wiles** - Editors of the Del-Val CWRT and Old Baldy CWRT newsletters. We exchanged newsletters with many round tables in the country. Without a doubt Pat and Don are the best.

We must also note the membership of the Del -Val CWRT has provided with lots of help and support over the years.

Visitors of note:

- **Happy Rockefeller** wife of Vice President and Governor Nelson Rockefeller. She is a decedent of General George Gordon Meade. Made a nice contribution to the Meade Room.
- **Lynn Abraham** District Attorney of Philadelphia. She was escorted by former Frank Rizzo body guard Tony Fulwood – all six foot plus of him.
- Governor Tom Ridge's wife **Michele Ridge** (body guards and all!) visited the War Library several years back. She was a very nice lady.
- **Alex Trebek** - Jeopardy Host. A Civil War buff who donated several items to the museum.

Members who went on to bigger and better things:

- **Wilson Greene** historian at Fredericksburg NMP. One of the founders of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites also served as president. Now the Director of Pamplin Historical Park in Petersburg, VA.
- **Frank O'Reilly** National Park Service Historian and tour guide. Wrote the definitive book on the battle of Fredericksburg.

Kids say the darndest things!

On a visit a group of students from a local private school were seated in the Meade Room. Their teacher asked them to pick one item in the room and say something about it. One young man picked out the Meade uniform and remarked it was the uniform the general wore at the battle of Gettysburg. Very good!

Another young man picked out the saddle General John Reynolds was riding on when he was shot at Gettysburg's first day. He added "He was also the inventor of *rental cars!*"

Old Baldy was always a big hit when groups of young people visited. One day a group of Boy Scouts came in and, as young people do, were running wild. At that time Old Baldy was in the back room covered with a blanket waiting for his display case to be built. I grabbed a group of runners and told them if they behaved, I would show them something very special in the back room. At the end of the tour they took me up on my offer. I lifted the blanket to show Old Baldy in all his glory. With that one youngster replied, "*Cool, got any cows!*"

Of course there are scores of members of Old Baldy who helped make our round table what it is today. My memory is not what it used to be, so I apologize to each and every one of them for not giving them the credit they deserve. The important fact is that the Old Baldy CWRT is alive and well under new leadership supported by my long-time members.